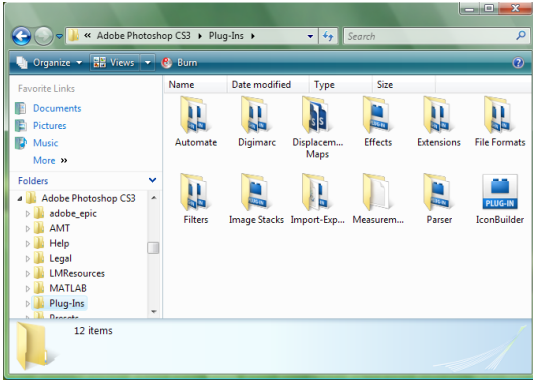




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IconBuilder and Adobe Photoshop (fig. 1) - Once installed, IconBuilder lives in the Plug-Ins folder of Adobe Photoshop along with other default plug-ins.

What is IconBuilder?

IconBuilder is a filter for use with Adobe Photoshop™ that makes creating icons a snap. IconBuilder harnesses the flexibility of Photoshop to make a powerful icon creation tool for both beginner and advanced users.

Written by veteran Photoshop filter author - Craig Hockenberry, IconBuilder is an ideal “real world” solution for creating 32 bit icons for all versions of Windows including Vista, XP, Windows 2000 and the rest. Thanks to the use of layers (and their transparent properties), Photoshop makes the perfect editor to create the blended shadows, smooth outlines and translucent areas that modern icons demand. IconBuilder has the ability to translate any kind of transparent effect done in Photoshop layers, quickly and easily into icons for Windows Vista and beyond.

It is important to realize that IconBuilder is not an icon editor itself. The filter is a construction tool you can use to quickly assemble various resources you have prepared in Photoshop or Fireworks.

Summary of IconBuilder for Windows Features

- Creation of 256x256 Windows .ICO files for Windows Vista
- Creation of all classic Windows based .ico file formats (WIN 95, 98, NT, 2000 & xp)
- View icon information and correct errors prior to saving via Resource Verification
- Supports transparent/translucent masking of icons
- QuickBuild™ feature creates all icon resources in a single click
- Extract any icon (including its mask) into Photoshop for editing
- Cycle background colors to view icons in a variety of UI elements
- Instant access to ToolTips for novice and advanced users

System Requirements

- Windows XP or Vista
- An application that is compatible with Photoshop Plug-ins such as Adobe Photoshop 7, Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 or later, or Macromedia Fireworks CS3.
- Screen resolutions at or above 1280x1024 pixels

Install IconBuilder for Windows

To install IconBuilder for Windows, copy the entire contents of the IconBuilder 2.0 folder into the Photoshop plug-ins folder. By default, the path to the plug-ins folder is [C:\Program Files\Adobe\Photoshop ##\Plug-Ins](#) (where ## is the version number you are using.)

** If Photoshop is not installed on C: drive. The path stated above will need to be modified to reflect the correct drive name.

NOTE: After installing IconBuilder, we recommend you first review the [Tutorial PDF](#) step by step to gain a better understanding of how the filter works. Once you have completed the tutorial, then you can review the [User's Guide](#) for more in-depth information.

You will need the free Acrobat Reader (available for download at <http://www.adobe.com/acrobat>) to view and print the PDF files.

Please report any bugs or problems to iconbuilder@iconfactory.com

Loading IconBuilder Assistant (Action)

IconBuilder Assistant is a collection of actions that help you by automating certain tasks associated with icon creation. Descriptions of each action follows the instructions on how to load IconBuilder Assistant.

To load IconBuilder Assistant, [launch Photoshop](#) by clicking its application icon in the Start Menu. Once running, activate the Actions palette by selecting [Window > Actions](#) from the main menu.

Next, click the small triangle on the top right side of the palette to access the menu options for Actions. Select [Load Actions...](#) and a standard dialog box will open.

Then, to locate the IconBuilder Assistant actions file, navigate your hard drive to find the IconBuilder folder that was installed earlier. Select [IconBuilder Assistant.atn](#) and click [Load](#) to import the actions into Photoshop.

You are now ready to use IconBuilder Assistant. Simply select the action you want to use from the Actions Palette or assign it a command-key shortcut.

The actions that are included with IconBuilder Assistant include:

Generate Windows Standard - The action works with the Windows.psd grid file. It uses artwork placed in the the 48x48 grid box and automatically creates 32x32, 24x24 and 16x16 versions for each depth automatically.

Generate Vista - The action works with the Windows.psd grid file. It takes artwork placed in the 256x256 grid box and creates 48x48, 32x32, 24x24 and 16x16 versions for each depth.

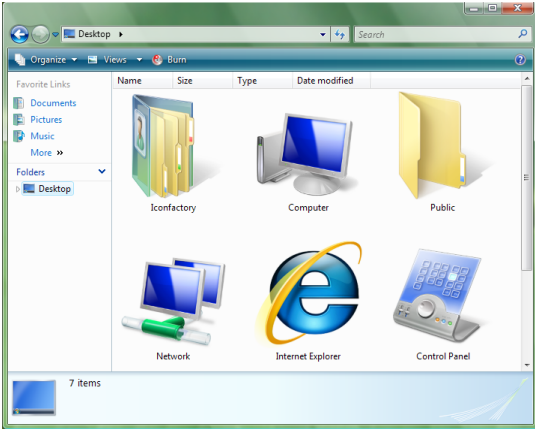
Create 8-bit copy - This action can be used to automatically create an 8-bit version of a 32-bit icon. It is only available in Photoshop since Fireworks does not have any built-in features to palletize an image. The action takes the selection you have in Photoshop and reduces it to an 8-bit, adaptive palette image in an RGB layer. This is useful when you are creating Windows icons that need a 256 color icon as well as a 32-bit icon.

Create 4-bit copy - This action can be used to automatically create a 4-bit version of a 32-bit OR 8-bit icon. It is only available in Photoshop since Fireworks does not have any built-in features to palletize an image. The action takes a Photoshop selection and reduces it to a 4-bit image in an RGB layer. The 4-bit image will use the standard Windows VGA palette. This is useful when you are creating Windows icons that need a 16-color icon as well as a 32-bit icon.

What's New in this Release?

To see what's new in this release, please check the [Setup.rtf](#) file that is included in the IconBuilder for Windows download.

List of Features



Modern Icons for Modern OS (fig. 2) - The release of Microsoft's Windows Vista operating system introduced desktop icons with a maximum dimension of 256x256 pixels. IconBuilder for Windows supports the creation of these modern icon formats as well as traditional Win .ICO files

IconBuilder was created by people who love to make icons. We wanted a tool that fit our needs both as hobbyists and professionals. For a more in-depth assessment of IconBuilder's extensive feature set, please read below.

Create 256x256 pixel icons for Vista - The increasing size and resolution of today's desktop displays requires larger and larger desktop icons. IconBuilder can easily create the large resources needed for Windows Vista desktop icons, all with a single click.

Creation of true 32-bit icon formats - By combining custom icon data (that you create or import) as well as 1 bit or 8 bit transparent masks from Adobe Photoshop layers, IconBuilder can create transparent icons on the desktop in a matter of seconds.

Resource verification guards against errors - View specific and detailed resource information for each icon. This allows you to spot errors and warnings to correct them prior to the final save operation saving time and effort.

Create icons for the Windows Start Menu - In addition to the traditional icon sizes normally associated with classic .ico files (16x16, 32x32 and 48x48 pixels) IconBuilder also supports the creation of the 24x24 pixel resources needed by Windows for display in the Start Menu. This makes creating application icons easier than ever before.

Supports transparent/translucent masking of icons - Thanks to the 256 levels of transparency possible in a standard Photoshop layer, IconBuilder is able to read these levels and create transparent masks quickly and effectively. Multiple layers can even be combined to create complex transparent or translucent masks that can then be applied to standard icons. You can make the masks yourself, or have IconBuilder make them for you.

QuickBuild feature creates all icon resources in a single click - If you want the ease of creating all versions of an icon instantly, IconBuilder's "QuickBuild" feature gives it to you. Using this feature, you can get all the basic resources (data and masks) created and saved. If you want to go back and tweak them afterwards, that's a snap too.

Open .ico files into Photoshop for editing - IconBuilder allows you to Open almost any .ico file and see, for instance, how a particular icon's 8 bit mask was created. Using the "Apply" feature, you can then paste either the icon's visual data, the icon's mask, or both back out into Photoshop for editing.

Cycle background colors to view icons on a variety of possible desktops - Want to know what your transparent icon will look like against a background other than gray? IconBuilder lets you select from a multitude of solid colors to display your work against. Check how your icons look against standard UI and desktop colors.

Instant access to ToolTips for novice and advanced users - The filter comes with roll-over ToolTips to help you find your way around the interface until you're comfortable with the controls. These tips can then be turned off or on when needed.

Registering IconBuilder

To register the filter, press the [Register this copy of IconBuilder](#) button that is located at the bottom of the user interface.

A new window will appear with a [Submit Payment](#) button. When you press the button, you will be taken to a secure online ordering page where you can purchase the software. The online order form allows you to pay with a credit card, PayPal, and other forms of payment.

Paying with a credit card is the quickest method to submit your payment. Also, since the online transaction is secure, your credit card number is protected. After your payment is received and processed, your registration number will appear instantly onscreen and a copy of your receipt will be emailed to you.

Interface Overview

Entering Your Registration Code

Click the [Register this copy of IconBuilder](#) button within IconBuilder to open the register dialog box. Enter your name and registration number exactly as it is shown on your payment receipt. After clicking [Register](#), the program will thank you for registering. If you see an error message, check that the registration information you received from the Iconfactory matches the data you entered in the fields. Make sure that the case of the characters matches and that there are no extra spaces at the beginning or end of the input fields.

If you prefer to order IconBuilder by phone, please call The Iconfactory Monday through Friday from 9am-5pm (USA Eastern Standard Time) at 336.299.5251 and follow the prompts to reach the sales department.

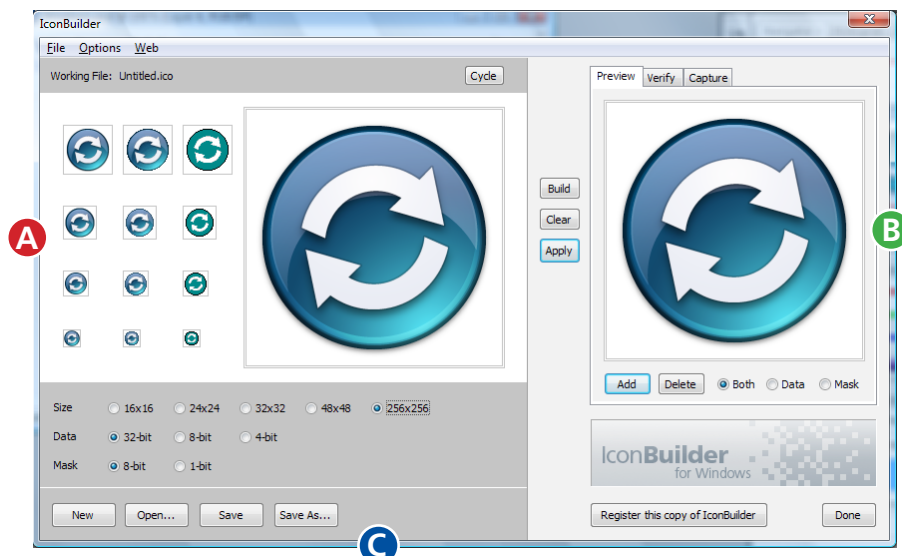
About the Interface

IconBuilder's user interface is broken into 3 main sections - the Resource Area, the View Panels and the Formatting Controls. It is important to know and understand the difference between these areas and their individual functions to help you build icons quickly and easily.

A) Resource Area - The Resource Area displays the actual icon data and mask info being built into the current icon. On the right it includes the three controls to build, clear and apply the artwork from the View Panel and lets you cycle through various background colors to view the icon against. The bottom of this section contains radio buttons that let you instantly tell what size, color depth and mask you are currently working with.

B) View Panels - There are three View Panels: Preview, Verify and Capture. The Preview Panel displays the currently selected resource. You may choose to view the resource's icon data, mask or both. The Verify Panel displays a report that makes it easy to spot potential problems with the icon before it is built and saved. Lastly, the Capture Pane shows the original artwork on the Photoshop layer you are currently working with. Its controls allow you to automatically zoom your view or unlock the position of the preset grid (something we don't recommend you do) prior to pressing the "Build" button.

C) Formatting Controls - These buttons allow you to create new icons, open existing Windows .ICO files, save existing icons or save out all new .ICO files from what has been built in the Resource Area.



A Guide to the Controls

Resource Area - Resource List	
1) File Menu	Create new icons, save out .ICO files and import existing icons into the filter.
2) Options Menu	Turn helpful Tool Tips on or off, set background colors, control custom color table usage and turn PNG Compression on or off for different Vista icon settings.
3) Web Menu	A list of hyperlinks that offer additional information about IconBuilder or icon design in general.
4) Color Cycle	Press this button to cycle through all of the various background colors you can view your icon against.
5) Resource Grid	The main working area of the filter that shows the default sizes and bit depths for standard Windows icons. Rows represent resource sizes and columns represent resource bit depths. 32-bit resources are shown on the left, 8-bit in center and 4-bit on the right. The large 256x256 resource only has a single depth (32-bit) and is displayed to the far right of the panel. The Resource Area contains radio buttons that can be used to quickly select a specific size and bit depth you need to work with.

View Panels - Preview Panel	
1) Add	Click this button to add only a single resource to the Resource Grid (mask, data or both).
2) Delete	Click this button to remove only a single resource from the Resource Grid (mask, data or both).
3) View Both	Displays the combined visual and mask data of the currently selected resource from the Resource Grid. This view shows how the icon would appear on the desktop and is the most common setting.
4) View Data	Displays only the visual data of the currently selected resource from the Resource Grid.
5) View Mask	Displays only the transparency, or mask data of the currently selected resource from the Resource Grid.

A Guide to the Controls

View Panels - Verify Panel	
Verification Report	Displays the current errors and warnings for the icon currently being built in the Resource Grid. Warnings and recommendations can be ignored if desired. Errors will require action from the user to correct the cited problem in order to be saved properly.
Test	Click this button to launch the IconBuilder Test panel. This panel lets you see how the icon being built will behave in Windows once saved. You can adjust view sizes, check button appearances and more.

View Panels - Capture Panel	
Zoom Small Resources	Checking this box automatically zooms smaller resources from the Photoshop Layer to the 4x original size for easy viewing and grid alignment.
Unlock Grid	Un-checking this box will allow you to manually reposition the capture marquees for special capture conditions. It is recommended that the Capture Grid always remains locked. If artwork is properly placed in the provided Photoshop template file, there should be no reason to unlock the Capture Grid.
Reset	This button resets the Capture Grid to its default position.

Formatting Controls	
New	Begin working with an all new .ICO file.
Open	Open an existing Windows .ICO file in IconBuilder for viewing, editing or applying to Photoshop.
Save	Saves the current .ICO file.
Save As...	Displays a dialog to select the name and location for the icon being saved.

Like most things, creating an icon starts with an idea. That idea may be sparked by a need to make a new application icon for a client or simply to make an icon for fun. A good way to start this creation process is to sketch out your idea. Sketching is a good way to test the “visual waters” and see what does and what doesn’t work within the confines of a square iconic space. Plus, it’s much easier to draw several pencil sketches than it is to sit and render a single icon in a vector program like Illustrator.



A matter of style (fig. 4) - Microsoft’s icon guidelines go into specific details about the look and appearance of icons for both the Vista and XP operating systems. Each has their own visual design and approach that you should be familiar with when creating icons for these OS’s.

Creation of Base Art

Everyone has their own method for generating the graphics that will eventually become desktop icons. Some like to use 3D modeling and rendering software. Some like to physically draw their artwork with traditional media and then scan it into the computer. At the Iconfactory, all icon creation starts with a vector-based drawing program, in our case Adobe Illustrator. Vector art is referenced in this user’s guide, the accompanying tutorial, and the PDF example file that comes with IconBuilder. To get a better understanding of the icon creation process, you can use a vector program like Illustrator to open the PDF example file and examine how it was created.

Developing base art for a Windows Vista icon begins with setting up a canvas in Illustrator that measures 256x256 pixels. This gives the artist a bounding box or visual guide for the maximum dimensions that the icon can occupy. Take note that if you plan on adding layer effects to the icon (like a drop shadow), you should leave extra room so those effects don’t make your icon too large.

Next, choose the colors and line weights you intend to use in your icon and start to draw the object(s) that will compose your creation (fig.4). You will find that line weight becomes very important, especially at the smaller icon sizes. A one point line may look great for a 256x256 icon, but will probably disappear when you rasterize that art at 32x32 pixels. The more you practice this initial drawing phase, the easier it will be to learn what line weights work well at what sizes. Draw a portion of the icon, import it into your image editor for viewing, and adjust it accordingly. Icons for Windows Vista have a completely different style from those in Windows XP. Much of XP’s style comes from line weight and shading. Compare line weights and shading styles in figure 4 above to see these differences illustrated.

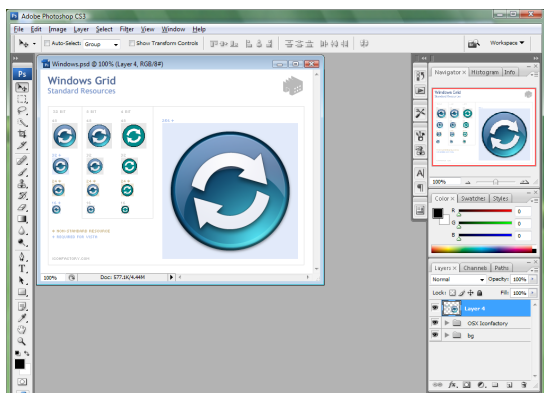
The use of color will also greatly determine how the final icon will look and whether or not it will be successful on the desktop. Don’t be afraid to experiment with gradients and different directions for light sources. Keep in mind however that if you are attempting to create a true “Aero” icon, Microsoft’s icon guidelines state specifics for light sources and “materials” to be used. Consult the built-in links to Microsoft’s Vista and XP guidelines under the filter’s “Web” menu for more detailed information.

Formatting the Base Art

Once you are satisfied with the quality and composition of the vector artwork, the next step is to format the art to import into Photoshop or Fireworks and then into IconBuilder. The base art can be imported or “rasterized” in any number of ways, but we find that creating a PDF file of the artwork works best. Once you have the PDF file you can open it in Photoshop or Fireworks at the appropriate size onto a transparent layer. Although an PDF file can be rasterized at any size, it’s best to keep the resulting image as close to the original dimensions as possible. Doing so results in a clean, sharp graphic and provides IconBuilder with a strong starting point to create the other icon sizes and bit depths.

The process of importing PDF files is covered in the IconBuilder Tutorial that accompanies this User’s Guide. We encourage you to review the tutorial step by step for more information about PDF files and how to import them.

Now that the base art is created and formatted, the next step is to prepare your artwork for optimal use in IconBuilder. Open the “Windows.psd” grid file that comes with the filter to arrange your art (fig. 5). Grid files are simply standardized layers to be used as templates to place, size, and edit your artwork for use with IconBuilder. Once you have placed your art, you can launch IconBuilder and simply press the “Build” button to instantly populate the resource grid. Save your icon to the destination of your choice and you are done!



Setting up the proper layers (fig. 5) - IconBuilder comes with a Photoshop template file named “Windows.psd” that you will use to place all of your artwork prior to running the filter. It contains placement boxes so you can accurately crop or scale your artwork. Paste your artwork at the proper size over the placement boxes and then merge them on a single layer so you can construct the final icon in IconBuilder.

Frequently Asked Questions

For a complete list of frequently asked questions, please visit our web site at The Iconfactory <<http://www.iconfactory.com>>. We've included some of the more common questions here for easy reference.

Why won't IconBuilder launch? Check to make sure you're running IconBuilder on a PC with the base system requirements we list on the first page of this document. If you do not have at least this minimum configuration, IconBuilder may not run properly.

There is a long pause when I run the filter. Why? IconBuilder is not free. The delay process is the filter's way of encouraging you to pay the registration fee. A great deal of time and effort went into making the filter as good as it can be. By registering to eliminate the startup delay, you are telling us you support our efforts to bring you quality software products. Visit The Iconfactory for pricing and registration information, and if you like & use the filter, please register it.

I've set a low transparency level on my layer, but the icon still shows as 100% opaque in IconBuilder, what is going on? Because of the way Photoshop handles individual layers, things like layer effects and opacity settings won't register in IconBuilder until you do a (Image -> Duplicate -> Merged Layers Only) command. This will generate a new layer with your previous settings "fixed" in the layer. IconBuilder should then read your opacity and layer effects settings. (see fig 7)

I'm getting memory errors when I use IconBuilder. What gives? You may have Photoshop's memory partition too low. Try increasing the overall amount of RAM allotted to the program and see if this helps eliminate these error messages.

When I click the save button, it seems to take a few seconds to save the file. Is there something wrong? This can be due to a number of factors: slow processor speeds, disk fragmentation, or other software running in the background. Try running only Photoshop or optimizing your HD and see if this helps eliminate delays in saving files.

I've built several icons, but they are not showing up correctly. What is going on? Certain versions of Windows contain bugs that affect how icons are displayed on the desktop. If certain resources are built into the .ico file, the icon may not show up properly. Check the Verify panel in the filter for suggestions on how to modify the icon and avoid these display problems.

How do I report a bug or submit a suggestion? Please send bug reports to us at iconbuilder@iconfactory.com as well as any suggestions for features you'd like to see in future versions of IconBuilder.

The following are a collection of helpful tips and tricks that you might find useful when constructing icons with IconBuilder. If you come up with any additional tips or tricks, don't forget to send them to us at webmaster@iconfactory.com!

Know the target OS - Before even one pixel is pushed, you should identify the OS the icon will be seen on. Why is this important? There are different color considerations when creating icons for different versions of Windows. Before Windows xp, virtually all .ico files contained the same sizes and bit-depths. This is not the case any longer, so know where the icon will be seen and used and design accordingly.

Keep it simple - With the introduction of millions of colors and transparent effects in Windows xp and Vista, we can already see the desire for icon designers and artists to move toward more complex, detail filled icons. While these features make it tempting to "go crazy" with your icon's design, resist the urge and keep it simple and clean. The icon should hold up equally well at millions or 16 colors.

Consult Microsoft's user interface guidelines - If you're using IconBuilder, then chances are you are designing icons for corporate clients and / or software developers. When designing and building icons for Windows Vista, it is important to consult the GUI guidelines Microsoft has set up for designers so that their icons look like they "belong" in the OS. Now, we're not saying that these guidelines should be considered the only way to design icons, but when you have a client that needs solutions for this operating system, at the very least, keep them in mind. Check the "Web" menu within IconBuilder to access the latest icon guidelines from Microsoft.

Name and save your layers - Using Photoshop and its multiple layers for composting and building icons is a time saver, but not if you can't find the layer you're looking for. Try to remember to name a new layer as soon as you create it. This will help later on when you all of a sudden have 60+ layers with 16x16 badges on them and can't find the one with "that widget" you've been looking for.

Turn off ToolTips - Once you get a feel for the controls in IconBuilder, feel free to toggle the ToolTips off. This will speed up your productivity and keep the UI clear of unnecessary elements.

Check out the Tutorial & Iconfactory home page - There are many more tips, tricks and helpful hints in the Tutorial.pdf file that came with the filter. Also, check The Iconfactory home page for the latest information on IconBuilder and other great icon related software.